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BY

MGR. MIGNOT

Archbishop of Albi

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[NOTE BY THE TRANSLATOR.—The following address was delivered by His Grace the Archbishop of Albi, Mgr. Mignot, on the occasion of the opening session of the *Institut Catholique*, or Catholic University of Toulouse, on Oct. 1, 1901. Among the audience were present the Archbishop of Toulouse and the Bishops of Pamiers, Montauban, Cahors, Beauvais, Perpignan, and Mende.

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THE METHOD OF THEOLOGY

BY MGR. MIGNOT, ARCHBISHOP OF ALBI

My Lords and Gentlemen,—

You remember that bitter cry, voiced in the figured language He so loved, which the spectacle of the moral degradation of the world before the preaching of the Gospel wrung from the soul of Jesus Christ. He saw souls wandering like sheep without shepherds, He saw the fields of truth abandoned like a harvest without reapers, and cried

out: "The harvest indeed is great, but the labourers are few. Pray ye therefore," He said, "the lord of the harvest that he send labourers into his harvest."

Aptly as these touching words applied to the towns and villages of the Decapolis under the Second Herod, no less aptly could they have been applied, in their measure, to the intellectual state of the Church in France twenty-five years ago. The Universities had been wrecked in the storms of those sad days, and were as yet buried beneath their ruins; and the Catholic clergy, working under great pressure, held too far aloof from the wondrous scientific development which so greatly distinguished the past century. To-day we realize the richness of this new harvest, which force of circumstances caused to be neglected, and which some even went so far as to despise. The

"labourers" have come; obedient to the wish of the Master, you, my Lords, have bid them come from your respective dioceses; they are here chosen from amongst the most active and able. It is no duty of mine, my Lords, to thank you for so doing, but in our common feeling of joy I may be allowed to give expression to the hopes we entertain for the future of our Institute, from the zeal of all the neighbouring bishops in supporting it by their counsels, their generosity and their confidence, from the wise and intelligent direction, alike progressive and orthodox, of its distinguished Rector,[1] and from the learning and labours of his masters and their pupils. My Lord Archbishop of Toulouse, the worthy heir of the paternal solicitude of his predecessors, told us, last year—

[1] Mgr. Batiffol.

and we have forgotten neither the charming simplicity of his words, nor the touching delicacy with which he made those memories live, nor that inspiring enthusiasm which prompted our applause—His Grace told us, in this very place, how the great work was begun, what sacrifices it had entailed, what difficulties it had to overcome; and in so doing he pointed out to us our duty, by showing us the example of those who had gone before. And our very presence here, my Lords, proves that we shall be able to fulfil those duties, and that in our hands the interests of Higher Ecclesiastical Studies will incur no danger. Christianity must shine as the focus of light and of love: the Church is and must remain the greatest teaching power in the world. To this fact it was that she owed her influence in the Middle Ages,

and it is only by intellectual and moral superiority that we shall regain our influence over society.

It is right, and in accordance with God's will, that there should be a certain proportion between the power of expansion of Catholicism and the perfection of the means of propagating it. In itself, this power has an absolute value ; in fact, its value is proportioned to the individual. The Apostles, doubtless, were weak and ignorant men ; but even they would have accomplished nothing had it not been for the wondrous transformation they underwent at Pentecost. Moreover, one may ask, What would have become of the teaching of Jesus Christ, had it not providentially encountered the soul of Paul, his intellect, his more classical culture, and his vigorous eloquence ? To judge from merely human likeli-

hood, it would never have passed beyond the circle of Israel, and might have merely given rise to a Jewish sect or schism.

The Christian Idea, called as it is to catholicity alike of time and place, must, in order to realize its fulness, satisfy by its comprehensiveness all the legitimate demands of the intellectual and moral life of man. Catholicism is universal not only because it must be preached to all men, but, above all, because it completes and perfects all the thoughts and aspirations of man. That is why, gentlemen, you are a *University:* you endeavour to comprise in your studies the whole field of human learning. For a similar reason you constitute what is primarily a Theological School. "Revealed truth," says Newman, "enters to a very great extent into the province of Science, Philo-

sophy, and Literature . . ."[1] and he very justly adds: "a University cannot exist externally to the Catholic pale, for it cannot teach universal knowledge if it does not teach Catholic Theology."[2]

This truth—unfortunately despised in our day by neighbouring Universities, so powerful withal, and wherein the lamp of Science shines so bright—this truth is the basis of our Institute, and that alone assures for it a career of usefulness, and real superiority. In it Theology occupies the place of honour, not in virtue of mere out-of-date prejudice, but because the same principle of classification applies to sciences as applies to the subjects of which they treat. Theology is at the head of the sciences, because God is at the summit of the scale of being. But

[1] *Idea of a University*, p. 72.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 214.

if Theology is really the converging point of the sciences, and if your studies are all theological, at least in their ultimate end, it is necessary to thoroughly understand the relation in which Sacred Science stands to other branches of knowledge; and to try and fix the laws of theological method in so far as, little by little, they become distinct from the general laws of scientific method.

I should perhaps astonish some theologians were I to state without any qualification that, from the point of view of method, Catholic Theology has not yet attained that degree of precision already reached by less important sciences. In so saying, I do not mean, as you will see, either to lower Theology or to minimize the far-reaching effect of the vast speculative work which has been the glory of the human

mind for so many centuries from the time of Origen to that of St. Augustine and from St. Ambrose to St. Thomas and Bossuet. None the less may we say that although Religion is complete and perfect—since in Christ it is contained whole and entire—the science of Religion is not, nor yet can it be: for its subject-matter is unfathomable and most complex. At the present day, those sections of Theological Science which are more akin to the positive and historical sciences seem to be making the most progress, and to have a more clearly defined method than the higher sections devoted to the exposition of Dogma. The results of scientific criticism are, of course, not complete nor fully certain, but the methods of scientific criticism are fixed, and that is sufficient to assure the future of any science. Whereas, on the

contrary, if we look at Dogmatic Theology, we notice in many theologians not a few signs of hesitation, which betray themselves in the rash adoption of hastily formed views, or in a blind unwillingness to accept the conclusions of kindred sciences, or at least in gropings which seem to show that the mind is not always master of its movements, nor quite confident in the methods it uses.

The explanation of this state of affairs is to be found in the turn taken by Scientific Thought between the epoch of the great theological schools and the development of contemporary science. A glance at the history of the human mind during the course of Christian civilization shows two successive stages, the one balancing the other in a sort of mysterious rhythm. There is the deductive and synthetic

stage, and there is an experimental and analytic stage. To each of these corresponds an expansion of knowledge, an expansion peculiar to itself, and in an opposite direction. For while in the former epoch Theology was the first constituted science, the starting-point of the scientific movement, and one may say the only Science, in the latter, Theology appears as dependent upon the other sciences and developed last of all, as the end and crown of all speculation.

The whole of human knowledge was at first in a state of utter confusion. Aristotle's first attempt at systematizing it had been lost in the far-reaching revolution which renewed the world after the fall of Rome. Cut off from its beginnings, deprived of all means of obtaining information, as yet unskilled in direct observation, and still,

unable to remain inactive, human reason had to be content with hasty generalizations, which covered as well as could be the slender collection of facts and memories it possessed. Christianity offered a valuable element of objectivity to this uncertain reasoning which knew not where to find a firm basis. It offered, on the one hand, the Scriptures, on the other, Dogma, which the Fathers had tinged with Hellenistic ideas: they furnished a chronology and a system of metaphysics which were accepted with confidence, and formed the framework of future developments. Such was the source from which by means of logic the solution of every problem had to be drawn. Science was deductive, and we may say, as was said of a famous prisoner, that it fed on its own life's blood. As new facts came to light

from the recesses of history or of nature, they were made to fit into the original framework: and thus were asssimilated the philosophy of Averroes as well as the discoveries of Albert the Great. In spite of its imperfect method, the science of the *Trivium* and *Quadrivium* is not wanting in grandeur, especially after the last touches given it by the great geniuses of the thirteenth century. At no period has human reason ever proved itself so great with such slender resources; so much so that when this great work of synthesis and integration was finished, there existed an imposing system, striking in its unity, laying claim to universal knowledge, and, in fact, containing within itself nearly all those truths which could be attained by dialectics alone.

But at the very moment when the

work was being completed, doubts began to arise. One discovery followed after another: Nature was revealing herself to such men as Roger Bacon, Galileo, and Gassendi; the thoughts of the ancients began to rise to life as monks deciphered the palimpsests, and the Turks drove the scholars of the East to the lands of the West. The framework of the Schools was found too narrow for all this new material, and soon began to show the artificiality hidden beneath it. Then was made a kind of inventory, a vast work of analytical revision, analogous to that which had been attempted in Greece after the great theological syntheses of Hesiod and Epimenides. The subject-matter of human knowledge became divided, and from out the universal *Science* the sciences sprang, one by one, as their several elements were discerned by

experiment and analysis, which were henceforth the masters of all the avenues of the mind.

We must consider, from our own point of view, this marvellous genesis of contemporary sciences, which goes on, day by day, before our wondering eyes. Knowledge is as it were subdivided into sections. The primary characteristic of a science is its separate subject-matter, and next comes its method; for both the one and the other are at once rigorously and specifically adapted, so that the determining of the subject-matter and the settling of the method of a science are strictly correlative conditions of its progress. Then, as Auguste Comte remarks, the sciences with the simplest subject-matter, such as Mathematics, Mechanics, and Physics, are naturally more quickly constituted than sciences with a more

complex subject-matter such as Anthropology, Sociology, and Politics; and thus there arises as it were a hierarchy of sciences, as in nature there is a hierarchy of living beings; so that, in their development, the higher sciences are subordinated to the progress of the lower, just as the leafy branches and delicate blossoms of a mighty tree depend for their growth upon its sturdy roots and knotty trunk.

It may well be asked whether theologians have paid sufficient attention to the new relations which have been growing up between the various branches of knowledge. Be that as it may, Theology, in so far as it is connected with the movement of Science, could not escape those relations; and it is by submitting itself to the laws which follow from those relations that Theology will take its proper

place in the cycle of contemporary thought.

Theology was at the starting-point of deductive science, but it can only be at the goal of analytical science. We have already seen that Modern Science starts from duly proved facts only. Now the subject-matter of Theology is not only beyond immediate experience, but is at once the most complex and the most difficult, since it comprises God and man and the universe from the point of view of their supernatural relations. It is impossible to deny that the supernatural life of man to some extent depends upon the natural order; hence it was that the Christianity of the Gospels appeared so late in the history of the world, and for the same reason Theological Science supposes a fairly advanced stage in the development of other forms of knowledge.

We are all aware that the subject-matter of Theology is distinct from that of the profane sciences, since it has been received from Revelation. Still, supernatural as the subject-matter may be, it has been given in nature, and joined to nature. "Is not this the carpenter, and the son of a carpenter?" asked the Jews of old. It cannot be defined in any human language, located in time or space, fixed in its relations to the other subjects of human knowledge, except by the help of the critical sciences. Hence, from this point of view, Dogmatic Theology is dependent upon General History, Exegesis, Philosophy, Epigraphy, and the rest. We are also aware that this subject-matter can only be rightly discerned by means of a principle of authority, which of itself determines a large number of theological conclusions. But outside

these conclusions is left a vast field for speculation; the conclusions themselves, immutable as they are, have to be rationally justified, explained, and rendered fruitful by the theologian; this he can accomplish only by means of the general ideas furnished by Philosophy, and the analogies revealed by the study of the Natural Sciences. And if it be always true to say with St. Paul that "the invisible things of God are revealed by His works," it must be admitted that on this ground also Theology is dependent upon the Philosophical and Natural Sciences.

After what has been said, it will be possible to realise the position of Theology in the world of Science. Like every other science, Theology has its own definite subject-matter, namely, Revealed Truth, as contained in Sacred Scripture and Ecclesiastical Tradition.

Upon this subject-matter the Theologian has a double task to perform: the task of critical interpretation, and that of dogmatic interpretation. It is the work of critical research to unfold the gospel fact, its preparation and development, to settle the literal and positive meaning of the biblical, patristic, or conciliar texts which contain Religious Truth—to prepare, in a word, materials for Sacred Science. The work of Interpretation is to co-ordinate these results, to mould them into a coherent and intelligible whole, and to connect that whole with an adequate conception of humanity and of the universe. It is perfectly evident that Interpretation cannot be ahead of research, but rather must follow; and it is evident also that merely critical work cannot forestall the work of Dogma. Positive Theology thus be-

comes the necessary foundation of Speculative Theology. The Vatican Council recognizes the complete independence of every science, in as far as it is true to its principles and its methods. The perfection attained by theological work will be the greater, and its method the more sure, in proportion to the advance of the sciences from which the theologian draws his information and his generalizations, and in proportion to the fuller sincerity with which he accepts the lessons they teach even where they clash with his own preconceived ideas.

Theology, then, is a dependent science, and that precisely because it stands at the head of all human knowledge. Some may, perhaps, consider that I exaggerate the dependence of Theology, because by far the greater

part of its propositions are certain, through the authority of the Church, apart from the workings of Science. This I am far from denying; I would only remark that certainty of a doctrine is one thing and its scientific exposition another. In every order of knowledge there are numerous facts of which we are certain, without being able on that account to connect them with any rational explanation. Similarly, in Theology, we know, through Authority, many truths which precisely constitute its subject-matter, and the certainty of which does not dispense us from seeking either their justification or their explanation in history and philosophy. It is essential that we should not confound the teaching of Dogma by the Church with the methodical organization of the Science, of which alone we are speaking under the name of Theology.

The best proof that can be given of the utility of this distinction is the fact that the imperfect state of scientific knowledge in past ages neither paralyzed the good influence of Christianity nor yet the development of its doctrine. The sun did not cease to shine and make the earth fruitful when men in their simplicity believed it to be fixed to a solid vault which turned overhead; and the light of faith illuminated souls even when its mysteries were conveyed to the mind by means of unverified concepts and incomplete knowledge. In spite of all that, doctrine still progressed. Clothed in language borrowed from different philosophical schools, with a vocabulary imperfect and changing as the thoughts of men, the Councils succeeded in fixing in their definitions the unchangeable relations which linked together revealed ideas : things divine

were expressed in earthly and relative terms. The time of scientific development has come; the crystal vault has vanished; our state of mind is as different from that of the Middle Ages as the heavens of Copernicus from those of Ptolemy: and yet we continue to read in language we have ceased to speak those truths which remain as beneficial and as luminous as ever, so true is it that the Word of life is above metaphysical and philosophical systems.

It is not my purpose to delay and discuss the error of those who dispute the claim of Catholic Theology to the possession of any scientific method, simply because it is subject to Authority. Theology, in this respect, is in a condition neither worse nor really different from that of the other sciences. Like physics or history, Theology is independent in its method and in its subject-matter.

This latter, however, is Transcendent Truth, beyond nature, and alike inaccessible to natural experience and to logical deduction; it is Revealed Truth and can only be known by the witness borne to it: hence it is that the theologian is bound by his very method to appeal to Authority. He has recourse to the infallible *magisterium* as the astronomer to the telescope: otherwise, both one and the other would be reduced to conjectures. Doctrinal Authority, in reality, is only a witness, a living and authentic witness, the witness of the divine *fact* which is continually being realized by the unceasing activity of grace in the souls of men; the witness of a *word* which does not pass away, of a Word ever vibrating in the consciousness of the Church. You are at liberty to describe this fact with deep-reaching analysis, to express this

word, to comment upon it, to develop it with all the brilliancy of your learning, but you are not allowed to presume the fact which lies beyond the ken of man, and your voice must ever be in accord with the secret voice, with the tone of the mysterious word which does not reach ears of flesh. You must do so, I say, under penalty of failing to reach the object of your study, for that is the only way to reach it. We can see that such is the case by the fate of Christian Theology outside the Church: it is a mere tissue of personal conjectures, a psychology of subjective impressions without any dogmatic consistency, without scientific authority, and without any definite subject-matter.

To Doctrinal Authority, then, Christian Theology owes its consistency, and it is the exceptional certainty which therefrom results, quite as much as the

sublimity of its speculations, which have made it the keystone of the vault of science. For since the sciences depend one upon the other, they help to verify one another, and Theology confirms and checks them all, because in it alone is found the final end of the Universe, and it is in their agreement with Theology that one day will be realized the unity of contemporary sciences. Theology has not yet ceased to be the Queen of Sciences and the Supreme Mistress of Truth, although the part it plays in the general movement of the mind differs somewhat from that attributed to it by our forefathers.

Theology, thus understood, is at once traditional and progressive in character.

It is traditional, because such is the condition of the existence of every science. For is it not the primary duty

of every science to retain the truths which have once been realized? Unless, therefore, we suppose all scientific effort to be in vain and self-contradictory, Science must be continuous: and continuous it is, in spite of reforms and corrections, for even in its transformations it still retains all the intelligible elements of its earlier form. However deep may be the intellectual chasm separating the Middle Ages from Modern Times, all the results of previous work have not been lost even to profane science itself; and, after showing what separates these two periods, it would be easy to trace the links of the chain which joins them.

Theology is traditional for the further reason that it is the science of Tradition. Outside Tradition, as we have seen, it has no subject-matter, and it is on

condition of faithfully following this Tradition, of being its disinterested interpreter, and of describing it under all its aspects, that Theology remains really true to its own laws.

Nor can we deny Theology a progressive character. Have we to cease to admit the truth that our intellect cannot exhaust any single thing, that there is nothing about which we know all that is to be known, and that the smallest living creature, as Pascal says, contains infinity ? The very nature of our mind renders all we know, even when most evident and true, subject to revision. For what we have once understood we may understand still better ; neither is there found faith or certainty so strong that it cannot be strengthened by new lights. When Bossuet wrote his *Discours sur l'histoire universelle*, or his *Politique tirée de*

l'Écriture Sainte, he proved himself a theologian of genius; yet what theologian at the present day would dare to put his own name to those masterpieces? Sometimes a few years suffice to modify the aspect of a question—a recent number of the *Revue Biblique*[1] calls attention to a case of the kind; for while in the earlier volumes of the *Cursus Scripturae Sacrae*, Father Cornely devoted about one hundred and fifty pages to completely establishing the Authenticity, Integrity and Mosaic Authorship of the Pentateuch, Father Hummelauer, coming to the end of his Commentary on the Torah, in the same series, and in the same number of pages, sets forth his opinion that the Pentateuch is not the work of one man, nor of one epoch, but of many centuries. To-day we smile at the explanation

[1] October 1, 1901.

which satisfied some of the Fathers, that the bloody sacrifice of Jesus was a kind of ransom paid by God the Father to the devil. The manifest inadequacy of this idea led to its being replaced by the more rational theory of the substitution of Christ for humanity to pay the debt of justice contracted by the sinner, not towards the devil, but towards God. Now, criticism is in turn brought to bear upon *this* thesis, which nevertheless satisfied the greatest theologians: it is seen to express only one very incomplete aspect of the mystery; for is not God far above the insults of man? Would such a debt exact from Jesus so awful a passion? Little by little the question takes a new aspect. Love is introduced, and the idea of trial and of a solidarity graciously established between God and man. Yet under all these different aspects there is the

same dogma of Christ's death for man's salvation.

Thus it is, gentlemen, that Catholic Doctrine grows and develops. The onward march of Theology in the mysterious region it explores, is like to that of an invading army: the definitions of the Church are, as it were, the outposts marking the successive advances of the occupying army. As the conqueror advances the field widens before him, and becomes richer the further he goes from his base; at each stage he moves forward his front line, and each resting-place is but the starting-point of the next forward move.

This work of adapting and of rendering fruitful the Sacred Science by circling round the same immutable doctrine, by causing floods of new

light to spring from the same unfailing source, is a necessary work. It is characteristic of the unceasing activity of the Spirit who animates and vivifies Christianity. Without Him, our faith would be like to those religions of Phœnicia or Egypt, which are now fixed for all time on the stone of steles and tombs—dead doctrines which no longer light up a human soul nor stir a human heart, monuments which learned men laboriously dig up out of the sands in which they are buried, and before which the traveller stands impassive, because his life draws its food from elsewhere, and because he bears another ideal within him.

But what is the organ of this development? How is the progress of Doctrine worked out in the Church, and how does it come to be fixed

in the authentic teaching of the Church ?

It is at this point, gentlemen, that the importance of Theology flashes upon us, as well as the part to be played by the Universities, and the providential mission of Catholic scholars.

It must be well understood that it is not as individuals, whatever be our learning, nor as University bodies, whatever be the prestige of such groups of men, that you constitute what theologians call the Teaching Church. You are not the guardians of that infallible *magisterium* which alone is competent to decree and define the Catholic Faith. We must take care to avoid the exaggerations of the unfortunate Döllinger, who, with his excessive confidence in Theology, compared it to "the prophets of old, assisting and dominating the regular

body of the priests;" and who had dared to pen this phrase which already contained in germ the root of his schism: "Theology is the authority before which all must finally bow down, the heads of the Church as well as the holders of power."

Döllinger inverted the true position. Theology has not to judge the "heads of the Church," but must itself bow before the decisions of their sovereign authority. It is almost inconceivable that a man of such standing could go so far as to forget one of the most essential, most fundamental, and most characteristic elements of Catholicism—the mysterious assistance of the Holy Ghost, who is the soul of Tradition, and who, while certainly not refusing theologians His assistance, has nevertheless no authentic organ but Apostolic Succession, and only finds His

final expression in the decisions of the hierarchical *magisterium*.

The more initiative we allow to individual thought in the development of Sacred Science, the more essential is it that we should hold firmly to the rule of faith which alone can retain for Doctrine that continuity which is indispensable to its progress. The Vatican Council reminds us of this in the beautiful chapter of its Constitution "On Faith and Reason," wherein the rights and duties of the human mind are so eloquently set forth. "The divine Deposit confided by Christ to His spouse" must be "faithfully kept," and hence it is that "dogmas must ever be retained in the sense once fixed by the Church, nor may that sense be departed from under the pretext of understanding them better." [1]

[1] Conc. Vatic. Const. Dogm., Sess. III. *De fide Catholica*, cap. iv. ad finem.

If such is the importance of Authority, what then is the office of Theology and of theologians? Have they to confine themselves to passively registering the definitions of the Teaching Authority? To use the familiar and expressive figure of an English writer, is "the whole Church to be compared to a train in tow of the Pope as locomotive, with bishops, priests, and laity linked on to him as mere carriages?"

We have already stated that such a conception is incompatible with the nature of the human mind and with the character of Science. We must beware of confining the life of the Church to the mind of one man, even though that man be clothed with Infallibility. The members of a body are as necessary to the head as the head is to the members, and if it is

the office of the Head of the Church to express Christian thought in its canonical form, it is the office of us all to prepare the elements thereof.

It is usual, in the Schools, to distinguish between the *Ecclesia Docens* and the *Ecclesia Discens*. The expression *Ecclesia Discens*, however, is not satisfactory, because it fails to express the reciprocal action, the mutual solidarity which unites the representatives of Authority with the representatives of Science. In place of this term, which leads one to suppose the latter to be purely passive, I agree with the writer of a recent article in *The Weekly Register*,[1] that another might be adopted in which the activity of the faithful would be harmonized with the submission they owe to the teaching of

[1] *Weekly Register*, July 19, 1901. *Docens discendo.*

the Sacred Hierarchy, so as to distinguish at least in the *Ecclesia Discens* the Church that learns, the Church that seeks and finds, and the Church that studies and renders fruitful the lessons learned—the *Ecclesia Discens* side by side with and subject to the *Ecclesia Docens*.

"It might be said," remarks the same writer, "that in the life of the Church her infallibility is negative and protective." Doctrinal progress is in the *Ecclesia Discens* before it passes into the *Ecclesia Docens :* it is the fruit of united Christian effort ; doctors, sages, saints, and mystics have worked it out in their solitary musings, their writings, their schools, before Authority fixed it in its canons. "The *Ecclesia Discens* asks the questions, suggests new aspects and ideas, puts out all sorts of feelers in the shape of social, theolo-

gical, political novelties. And then there comes the action of Authority—patient, cautious, discriminating; now letting alone what it mistrusts to the operations of time, now silently discountenancing, now positively censuring, now approving tacitly, now promulgating officially, but throughout acting on material provided by the *Ecclesia Discens*." [1]

You, gentlemen, are the Church that learns, the Church that studies, and actively and submissively prepares and renders fruitful the words of the Teaching Church. It is you who annotate and illustrate her decisions; ever in contact with the natural, historical, philosophical, and social sciences, you bring the discoveries of the human mind to bear upon the sacred formularies, and with the help

[1] *Weekly Register, l. c.*

of new analogies, undesigned coincidences, and a degree of exactness unknown to our forefathers, you find in those formularies a deeper meaning, a wider application, and as it were a *growing* truth, which grows with the growth of knowledge as a whole. Not only do you interpret Tradition, but by your searching analysis you discover therein unsuspected riches. And so you continue the work begun by the Fathers and Doctors when they applied the dialectical methods of Greece and Rome to the simple words of the Gospel. Just as no one would pretend that the work of St. Augustine was useless after that of Tertullian and Origen, nor that of Bossuet after the work of St. Thomas, so also after the work of all these lights of Catholic Theology, we have the right to expect something from our young Universities.

Let us be the first to recognize the fact that this toil of the *Ecclesia Discens* is not without its dangers and troubles. There are moments of exultation, but there are also moments of difficulty. The joy of discovery and the joy of possessing wide horizons is mingled with the constant peril of illusions and of false steps. The task is an arduous one; it demands lengthy researches, great erudition, and constant application to difficult problems. If the curiosity of the mind easily finds therein enough to satisfy it, the heart not unfrequently suffers in passing through regions of doubt and darkness, on the edge of the abyss of mysteries. Simple souls do not realize the cost of truth. Speaking of the Bible, an English writer says: "This book is like the wheat at harvest-time. There is the ear bearing and protecting the

grain : that is the historical part, and often it is not very nourishing ; then there is the grain itself, which is the whole Gospel, from Eden to the Apocalypse, and that is the bread of the soul. But first the ear must be beaten, and the chaff winnowed. How beautiful it is to see the bright grain flowing like a stream over the granary floor where the sunbeams make it glitter like gold : but on the threshing-floor it is hard to breathe, and when the grain is taken away, the chaff is worthless." [1]

These truths ought to suffice to assure to Christian scholars that respect and consideration without which it is impossible for them to succeed in their undertaking. Not that such is always the case. For we

[1] "Lachlan," by Ian Maclaren. *Revue des Deux Mondes*, March 1, 1901.

sometimes see imprudent men, whose hand was never made to hold the flail of criticism, and whose lungs cannot bear its pungent dust, risking themselves on "the threshing-floor," and far from doing any good there, they are choked, they disturb everything, and then complain that the harvest is being spoilt. Such men must be excluded, and be content to receive our results when they are ripe. And while we are busy changing into nourishing food the sheaves we gather in the fields of Sacred Tradition and of profane Science, and separating the cockle from the wheat, let us not interrupt our task, but look out for the signal of the infallible Master, whose vigilance will not be wanting.

While we claim for Christian scholars the right freely to pursue their studies under the protection of the Church,

we must also grant them the very human right of occasionally being mistaken. Error is an unavoidable phase of the development of the mind; for the scholar who is sincere, it is often an indirect way to the truth; and to none does it present less inconvenience than to the Catholic scholar, for in his case it can only be transitory, involving neither Theology nor the Church, which when the time comes will be quite able to set matters right. Let discussion have time to do its work, and let it make use of scientific methods only; there should be no invective or violent words, which show a zeal for orthodoxy more worthy of knights-errant than of conscientious scholars. Some Catholics are uneasy when they find any of our scientific conclusions coincide with opinions expressed by heterodox or non-Christian scholars;

they say it is "protestantizing" or "rationalizing" the Church. Such barbarisms, however, do not get rid of the fact that Science is one, that certitude imposes itself upon the mind of man, and that sound Theology accepts every truth no matter from what source it springs. We must rejoice at the wise slowness of the Church to adopt in her official teaching systems which have not stood the test of long experience ; for in her Schools she has seen so many opinions and controversies pass away. We must bear with her not being aroused so quickly as we are ourselves ; but let us make use of the liberty she leaves us, for all her children are equal in her maternal eye, and no one, outside the Sacred Hierarchy, has been appointed the guardian of orthodoxy. But whether we be historians or philosophers,

exegetes or metaphysicians, theologians of whatever stamp, let us not implicitly arrogate to ourselves the privilege of inerrancy. As long as the Church rejects or holds in suspicion any new theory you may be sure, gentleman, that, however attractive it may appear, its soundness is not yet proved, and that there still remain contradictions to be solved in the working of the system. But if the light shines forth and Theology takes a new form, if not final, at least reconcilable with truths already acquired, the most conservative schools will not long delay in accepting it. Aristotle's philosophy, so long an object of suspicion, took precedence of all others when it was applied by St. Thomas. The system of Copernicus had to prove its worth, and is now universally accepted by exegetes. You know with what justifiable misgivings

the idea of Evolution was received in our Schools—an idea which appeared bound up with pantheistic philosophy. But now that the contents of the idea have been analytically ascertained it is almost unanimously recognized that Evolution—in a certain sense—can be reconciled with a religious and a Christian conception of the Universe. In germ it is found in St. Augustine, and with Vincent of Lerins we find that when applied to religious history it may cast light on problems which would otherwise have remained unsolved.

And thus it is, gentlemen, with all new conquests of mind: they must pass through the sieve, they must be tried in the fire, before they are received into the teaching of the Schools, and thence pass into the official decisions of Councils and Popes. Never was

there an age richer than ours in such conquests, or one that furnished more important and more precious matter for theological work. I may then return to the image I have so frequently used, and apply in this sense the words of the prophet, "Put ye in the sickles, for the harvest is ripe."[1]

In concluding these reflections on the methods of theological work, let me take my stand upon the experience of men most sage and saintly, to guard you against too ambitious illusions which might lead you to mistake the aim of your efforts and their real end.

"Happy is he whom truth teaches by itself, not by figures and words that pass, but as it is in itself."

"O God, who art the Truth, make me one with Thee in everlasting love."

[1] Joel iii. 13.

"Let all teachers hold their peace, let all creatures keep silence in Thy sight, speak to me Thou alone." [1]

Such will ever be the essential condition for understanding divine teaching. Long before the author of the *Imitation*, and in the same sense, Jesus Christ had uttered those celebrated words which will ever characterize man face to face with the Gospel mysteries: "Blessed are the poor in spirit."

It is by a confession of humility that our knowledge must begin and end; in the very highest flights of the mind our speculations must end in childlike views, for "unless you become like little children you shall not enter into the Kingdom of God."

As positive criticism raises the veils which still surround that reality, now

[1] *Imitation*, i. 3.

as mysterious as it will then appear simple, the reality of biblical and evangelical history; when both the literal and symbolical explanation of each text and of each discourse is finished—if ever it can be; when we possess not only the true aspect of each fact, but the exact meaning of each word; when our Dogmas have been expounded not only in the language of Plato and Aristotle, but with all the subtleties of modern thought, and with the help of the striking analogies revealed by the spectacle of Nature better known; when the Church, following step by step all the efforts of human thought, shall, by successive definitions, have clearly traced the boundaries of her Doctrine, and set all errors right—even then, it will be found that we have only reached the edge of the abyss of

knowledge, and that the mystery which fills it remains inaccessible; it will be seen that the successive conceptions of Philosophy have passed over the Gospel like the light of ephemeral stars, without in the least affecting the diamond-like structure of the Sacred Word. We shall acknowledge that that Ineffable Love on which were exhausted all the resources of language can have no higher nor more perfect expression than the words of Jesus—words so simple and touching, alike free from and above all scientific preoccupation.

Thus, gentlemen, the last effort of human thought, the perfection of clearness attained as the result of all critical and theological science, will be to understand better—perhaps I should say with Pascal, to make more "sensible to the heart"—all the divinely un-

foreseen, the eternally inexpressible, all the strength and truth in those beliefs which from their very beginning have so deeply modified man's moral life. The progress of Theology will be a simplification, an intelligent and fully justified return, through the complexity of intellectual experiment, to the comprehensive clearness of the primitive formulas, which already contain all it is possible to know about our final destiny. The numberless aspects of this one mystery which Tradition will have developed in a series of definitions and dogmas will, like some great algebraical problem, be resolved into clearly seen and very simple factors, of which the luminous elements will ever remain impenetrable. And, in fact, what can all the sciences together add to the knowledge of God given us by those divine words which we utter

every day: "Our Father, who art in Heaven"? And to explain the mystery of Jesus Christ, what reason could be added to this, that "having loved His own, He loved them to the end"?

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